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Sewall. Sermon delivered at the funeral
of Rev. Samuel Stearns. 1835

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November 26, 1917

S E R M O N ,

DELIVERED DEC. 30, 1834, AT

T H E F U N E R A L

OF THE

REV. SAMUEL STEARNS, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE TRINITARIAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AND SOCIETY,

IN BEDFORD, MASS.

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE,

DECEMBER 26, 1834,

In the 65th year of his age, and 39th of his Ministry.

BY SAMUEL SEWALL, A. M.

Pastor of the Church in Burlington, Mass.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

BOSTON:
WILLIAM PEIRCE, NO. 9, CORNHILL.

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CORRESPONDENCE.



LETTER TO THE AUTHOR.

Bedford, Feb. 11, 1835.

DEAR SIR,

The undersigned, a Committee appointed by the Trinitarian Congregational Church and Society in Bedford, hereby express the vote of thanks of said Church and Society to the Rev. Samuel Sewall of Burlington, for his highly acceptable services at the funeral of the late Rev. Samuel Stearns of Bedford, and request a copy of the sermon delivered on that occasion for the press.

Dear Sir, by preparing and forwarding the same, you will confer a favor upon the bereaved Church and Society, upon the numerous friends of the deceased, and much oblige

Your friends and servants,

REV. MR. SEWALL.

AMOS HARTWELL,
MOSES HAYWARD,
LEWIS P. GLEASON,
OLIVER R. ABBOTT.

REPLY.

Burlington, March 11, 1835.

GENTLEMEN,

Your very respectful communication of the 11th ult. was duly received, and would have been earlier acknowledged, but for sickness in my family. It is highly gratifying to me to learn from you, gentlemen, that my services at the funeral of your late revered and lamented pastor were acceptable. The discourse delivered on that melancholy occasion was written with a view to the consolation of the bereaved Church and Society which you represent, as well as of the numerous friends and mourning family of the deceased. And as it appears from your note, that it would be an additional gratification to them to have it in print, I freely transmit a copy of it, at their request, to be at their disposal.

With much respect, Gentlemen,

Your friend and well wisher,

SAMUEL SEWALL.

MESSES. AMOS HARTWELL, MOSES HAYWARD,
LEWIS P. GLEASON, and OLIVER R. ABBOTT,
*a Committee of the Trinitarian Congregational
Church and Society in Bedford.*

N O T E .

The passages inclosed in brackets were omitted in the delivery. Likewise in revising the Discourse, it has been thought proper to add a sentence, or member of a sentence, here and there, where perspicuity, or justice to the subject treated of, seemed to require it.

SERMON.

JOHN XI. 25, 26.

“JESUS SAID UNTO HER, I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE :
HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL
HE LIVE ;

“AND WHOSOEVER LIVETH AND BELIEVETH IN ME, SHALL NEVER
DIE. BELIEVEST THOU THIS ?

These words are from the well known discourse of Jesus with Martha, mourning for the death of her brother Lazarus. This Lazarus had been a friend of Jesus, loving him, and beloved by him. But the love which the Savior had for him, did not exempt him from death. This friend of Christ died, Christ himself declining to interpose his power to prevent it, when he might. And Christ still suffers his friends to die ; he still permits the King of terrors for the present to triumph over them. But at the same time, he has provided in his Gospel abundance of consolation for surviving friends. He spake the words just read to you, for the comfort of Martha on the occasion referred to. And when at the present day those whom he loves sicken and die, and pious survivors follow their remains to the tomb, I know of no passage in the Book of God more consolatory than that which I have selected for the theme of my discourse on the present solemn occasion ; or to which their contemplations may more profitably be directed.

We are called, my hearers, in the Providence of God, to pay the last office of friendship to a venerable servant of Christ, and faithful minister of his Gospel. We are assembled in this house

of prayer to express our grief at his death ; to sympathize with his bereaved family, relatives and flock ; and to prepare to consign his cold remains to the silent tomb. Under such circumstances, where shall we find ground of comfort and support, if not in the assurances of our divine Lord in the text ? This passage of Holy Writ presents to us the Lord Jesus in a most interesting and endearing light, on an occasion like this. It furnishes ample matter of seasonable instruction ; it opens abundant sources of consolation and hope to the pious soul. Permit me then, in further discoursing upon it, first, to enlarge upon the titles or character which the Lord Jesus there assumes, and upon the assurances which he gives, in those characters, concerning all who believe in him ; secondly, to attempt displaying some of those consolations, which believers may derive from the consideration of these characters and assurances of Christ, in view of their own death, or that of friends who die in the Lord ; and lastly, to endeavor some application of this subject to the present impressive solemnity.

I. [The words of the text, you will recollect, were in reply to an observation which Martha had just made concerning her deceased brother. "I know," said she, (v. 24,) — "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus, in his answer to this, while he implicitly sanctions that great article of Jewish as well as of Christian faith, the resurrection of the dead, of which Martha here acknowledges her belief, doth likewise expressly signify to her the relation which he himself sustained to this great event, and the blessed consequences which would flow from this relation to all who believe in him. "Jesus said unto her," proceeds the sacred historian, v. 25, 26, — "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this ?"]

The titles which the Lord Jesus here assumes, are two : viz. the Resurrection, and the Life.

1. First, I am the Resurrection : that is 'I am the efficient cause of that great event in which you, Martha, have, on good grounds, just avowed your belief, the resurrection of the last day. I am the mighty agent, who will accomplish that solemn, that wonderful work, to which you profess to look forward with the eye of faith : I am he that will raise the dead.'

To raise the dead has ever been justly regarded, as a peculiar act of the divine power. It is a work which no created agent is competent to effect. To collect our scattered ashes, to awake our sleeping dust, to restore and quicken these mortal bodies, and to reunite them with those immortal spirits from which death hath severed them, is the sole prerogative of Him, who formed man at the first out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him the breath of life. That the Omniscient, Almighty One should do it, is not incredible : and to deny that he may, is greatly to err, "not knowing the Scriptures," nor the power of Him, to whom all things, not absurd in themselves, are possible. But it is incredible, that any creature should do it, by any power that is properly his own : as incredible even, as it is that he may create a world. There are not wanting instances indeed, either in the Old Testament or in the New, of persons that were dead being restored to life by holy Prophets and Apostles. But then these, as well as the other miracles which they wrought, were evidently wrought, not by any power that could be called their own ; but, as they themselves confess, by the mighty power of God working in them, and by them. What St. Peter said to the multitude, assembled to witness the cure wrought by him and St. John at the beautiful gate of the temple, the same in effect he might doubtless with propriety have said to them, had they been spectators at Joppa of his raising Dorcas from the dead. "Ye men of Israel," said he on the former occasion, (Acts iii. 12, 16 :) — Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ? The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus ; — And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know," &c. Moreover, when the same Apostle healed the paralytic Eneas, his address to him was not, Eneas, I make thee whole, Acts ix. 34, but "Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." And when the sacred historian makes mention of similar supernatural cures performed by St. Paul, his language is, not, 'Paul wrought special miracles,' Acts xix. 11, but "God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul." Did the inspired Apostles then glorify God for the miraculous cures which they performed ? Did they ascribe them to the Lord Jesus, working with them by signs and wonders ? We

may be sure, that they would have disclaimed the power by which they restored the dead to life, as being their own; that they would have attributed it to God, or to the Lord Jesus Christ. Though persons, then, in a few instances recorded in Scripture, have been restored to life, instrumentally, by the word of Prophets and Apostles; yet the resurrection of the dead is still to be accounted, as a peculiar effect of the divine power. Accordingly, God is distinguished in Holy Scripture, as eminently He which raiseth the dead; He to whom it properly belongs to quicken them, and bring them again from the grave. This mighty work is everywhere represented on the sacred pages as a divine work. Sometimes it is appropriated to God the Father, of whom are all things. And sometimes it is attributed to the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things; to the eternal Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, but who in due time for us men, and for our salvation, assumed our nature, was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. By him, we are assured, (John i. 3. Col. i. 16.) "All things were made:" that "by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible." And certainly a creative power, a power that can from nothing call into existence, must be competent to quickening the dead. To the incarnate Word, to the Lord Jesus Christ, may with reason be ascribed the power of raising anew and reviving our mortal bodies, when dissolved in the dust whence they were fashioned by his hand. Accordingly, this power is claimed by him in those memorable words, (John v. 21,) "As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." Could a mere mortal man, could an angelic spirit even, speak in terms like these? The Son of God doth here put himself as it were on a level with the Father, he asserts a power of doing in this instance as the Father doth; and that, according to his own will, agreeably to the dictates of his own wisdom and sovereign pleasure. As he now quickens the souls of men, dead in trespasses and sins, by his life-giving Spirit; so the hour is coming, when he will raise and quicken their mortal bodies from the ruins, to which death and corruption have reduced them.

In evidence of his power, as a divine Person, to raise the dead, the Son of God raised himself from the dead, when he had

been crucified and slain for us. This astonishing work is usually ascribed in holy Scripture to God the Father Almighty; [and St. Paul, in speaking of it to the Ephesians, seems to want words by which to express his sense of the greatness of the power, by which it was wrought. "That ye may know," saith he (Eph. 1: 18, 19, 20.) "That ye may know — what is the exceeding greatness of his power, to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power," (or literally from the original, 'according to the energy of the power of his might,') which "he wrought in Christ when he "raised him from the dead," &c. &c.] But there are not wanting passages, which show there was a concurrence of God the Son with God the Father in this great work. Said Jesus to his disciples on a certain occasion, (John x. 17, 18,) "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." And the power, which he here asserts, of resuming that life which he should voluntarily lay down for his sheep, agreeably to his Father's command or charge, he had before assured the Jews that he would actually exert, when his hour to die should come. "Destroy this temple," said he, (John ii. 19,) "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." This saying seemed to the disciples as well as to the Jews, an ænigma, a hard saying, when it was uttered. But when he was risen from the dead, the disciples, we read, (John ii. 22,) "remembered that he had said this unto them;" and then understood they the interpretation thereof. What had before so perplexed them to comprehend, they now perceived that "he spake of the temple of his body." The body of the Lord Jesus was a temple, a house of God, by reason of the indwelling Deity: for in him dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (See Col. ii. 9.) This temple was destroyed, was brought into a state of dissolution and ruin, when life departed from it, as Jesus commended his spirit into his Father's hand, and voluntarily yielded up the ghost on the cross. But the same Jesus, who thus freely surrendered this temple to dissolution, did soon, as he had said, raise it up from its ruins. He raised it anew, when on the third day, by the exertion of his mighty power as God, the spirit which

had fled from it was brought back, breath was restored to it, and it became again the visible abode of Emmanuel, God with us.

Again, the Lord Jesus, as mediator, possesses a restoring, life giving power over the bodies of the dead. Having died, and revived, and become the Lord both of the dead and the living, the Judge of quick and dead, he will hereafter show his sovereign authority over the dead by raising them all from their graves. It is the language of inspiration, (2 Cor. v. 10,) "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Our souls are doubtless capable of joy or misery, apart from those bodies which they here inhabit. At death they will be made to partake, without question, of one or the other, in a greater measure or less, in their separate state. But as in the great day of account, we are to receive of our Judge according to deeds done in the body, done by our entire persons, both body and soul; so it seems meet unto God, that in our entire persons, both body and soul, we should be finally and fully rewarded or punished. But to this end it is requisite, that our bodies should be first raised. And accordingly we are taught by divine revelation, that the Lord Jesus, to whom all judgment is committed, and who will judge us at that great decisive day, will then raise our bodies from their graves, and summon us, in our entire persons, to his judgment seat, there to receive our sentence of justification or condemnation, reward or punishment from him. "Marvel not at this," saith he to the Jews, (John v. 28, 29,) "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice," (the voice of the Son of God) "and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." In that awful day, my hearers, the Son of God will indeed approve himself to be the resurrection, as he hath styled himself, when at his mighty voice, his irresistible command, earth and sea shall give up their dead; when the nations of them that sleep the sleep of death, shall awake and rise; and, together with all that shall then be alive on the earth, shall be gathered before his throne of judgment, to hear their final award.

But especially will the Lord Jesus then manifest himself, as the resurrection, to all them that believe in him. It is his own

gracious assurance in the text, "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." And agreeably to this encouraging declaration, verified presently after by the resurrection of Lazarus, all his faithful followers, in every age and nation, who shall at that day have fallen asleep in him, shall arise from their slumbers in the dust to renewed life, consciousness and activity. The resurrection is sometimes spoken of in the New Testament, with peculiar reference to the resurrection of departed saints, or the dead in Christ, and not to the general resurrection of all mankind. It is so to be understood through the greater part at least of the 15th chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians; where the persons to be raised up are eminently they that sleep in Christ, or they that are Christ's at his coming. (See 1 Cor. xv. 18, 23.) And with special reference to the same class of persons is the title to be understood, which our Lord assumes to himself in the text. Christ will raise all from the dead; but especially will he raise his saints. He is in an eminent sense the Resurrection, as he is the life, of all that believe in him. And on this foundation he builds that gracious assurance which follows: "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." He had before declared to the Jews, John vi. 39, 40. "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." They who are given by the Father unto Christ, are they that believe in him. These, as his own peculiar people, he exhibits himself, as it were, under special obligations to bring up from the grave, and not to permit death forever to have dominion over them. However obscure they be, however separated from one another, however scattered their dissolved dust; yet he remembers them all, he will suffer none of them, either in body or in soul, to be lost, but will raise them up at the last day. On that awful day, the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout; at the voice of the archangel, the dead in Christ, having their mortal bodies quickened, shall rise first; and in these bodies shall both they, and those who are Christ's and remain alive at his coming, present themselves before the Lord. And then shall he change them both, as to their mortal, corruptible

part, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Christ shall change their vile bodies, and make them like to his own most glorious body, according to that mighty working, that irresistible energy, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Their corruptible shall put on incorruption ; and their mortal, immortality. Their earthly, natural bodies shall become spiritual : and in these spiritual, refined, glorified bodies, shall they ascend to meet their Lord in the air ; and so shall they ever be with the Lord. (See 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. Phil. iii. 21, and 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52, 53.)

2. Secondly, the Lord Jesus styles himself in the text, the Life. "I am — the life." And in the fourteenth chapter of the same Gospel he assumes this title again. "I am the way," saith he, (John xiv. 6,) "and the truth, and the life." And by St. Paul he is represented as the life of believers. "For ye are dead," saith that Apostle to the disciples at Colosse, (Col. iii. 3, 4,) "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Christ is the life : that is, he is under God the author and the giver of eternal life ; of that which is life indeed. And this eternal life he gives to all that believe in him. To them he is indeed the author both of spiritual and of eternal life. Naturally or without the grace of God in Christ, all for whom Christ died, believers as well as others, are dead, as to all spiritual life and soundness. "We thus judge," saith the Apostle to the Corinthians, (2 Cor. v. 14,) "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." They are dead in trespasses and sins, and obnoxious to the second death, the miserable death of the soul. But God hath provided a way for their rescue in the Gospel of his Son. Saith the Lord Jesus to the Jews, (John v. 25,) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, *and now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God ; and they that hear shall live." The exalted Savior, "the Prince of life," addresses the spiritually dead, those who are in the perishing condition above described, both by his word and by his providence, in some such terms as these : 'Awake ye that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light ;' 'Come all ye weary and heaven laden, and I will give you rest,' &c. &c. (See Eph. v. 14 ; Matt. xi. 28.) And all they who listen to the voice of the Son of God, addressing them by these

his gracious invitations, with ready minds and obedient ears, are justified through faith in his name, are sanctified by his Spirit, do pass from death unto life, are no longer in a state of spiritual death and condemnation, but of spiritual life, peace, and hope toward God. Christ raises them from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. Through the Spirit of Christ they mortify the deeds of the body; they die to sin, and become alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. They lead the life of faith and renewed obedience here; and dying in the Lord, they shall receive at his hand that crown of everlasting life, which he now has in keeping for them, and which he will bestow on all who love him in the day of his appearing. Then will be fulfilled that gracious assurance, which the Savior utters at the close of the text. "Whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die." *Shall never die.* Supposing the death here spoken of to be temporal death, this declaration of Christ, as it respects the bodies of his saints, is not true: for believers in him do die; their bodies are as subject to temporal death, as those of other men. And as it respects their souls, it is as true of unbelievers, as of them. The spirits of the unjust, as well as those of the just, do not cease to exist, but live and return to God, when their bodies die, and go down to the grave. The Saviour, therefore, it is apprehended, must be understood to speak of the second or eternal death, the death of the soul, when he affirms in the text concerning them who believe in him, that they shall never die. "Shall never die;" or, as the words of the original might without impropriety have been rendered, 'Shall not die eternally;' that is, 'shall not die the death that is forever.' We know that God both can and will destroy the wicked, both in body and in soul, in hell forever. Saith Jesus to his disciples, (Matt. x. 28,) "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." And of them "that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," we read, (2 Thess. i. 9,) that they "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." But Jesus saith of his sheep, of all that believe in and follow him, (John x. 28.) "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." He receives their spirits at death to his arms, to be present with

him ; he will raise up their mouldering, dissolved bodies at the last day ; with these bodies, quickened, refined and glorified by his mighty power, he will reunite their perfected spirits ; and crown both with glory, honor and immortal blessedness.

II. Thus, my hearers, I have endeavored largely to illustrate those interesting titles or characters, which the Savior appropriates to himself in the text, and those gracious assurances which he founds upon them. Believe ye in these things ? Believe ye in him who spake them ? Do you trust in him for salvation, who is the resurrection and the life ? Do you walk in subjection to him ; and make him and his promises the ground of your hope and your delight ? Many and great are the consolations which you may derive, from the consideration of the characters in which he exhibits himself in the text, and of the declarations which he there utters, in times of trouble, and in the hour of death.

1. The devout contemplation of Christ as the resurrection and the life, and of his gracious assurances in the text, is calculated to establish our faith in the certainty of a resurrection from the dead, and to confirm in us a cheering persuasion of life and felicity in another world. Without the light of the Gospel, all beyond the grave is darkness, uncertainty and gloom. To an eye of sense, death seems too much like the extinction of our being, the final blow to our enjoyments and hopes. Where reason, unenlightened and unaided by divine revelation, is the only guide, the success of the wisest and most strenuous human efforts to penetrate into futurity, to ascertain the reality of a life to come, may be fitly summed up in those words of Job, (xiv. 7 — 10,) concerning the hopelessness of a dead person's reviving, as a tree when cut down, in this present world. "There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again : — But man dieth, and wasteth away ; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ?" But the Lord Jesus Christ hath removed the veil of darkness and uncertainty, which shrouded the tomb ; and hath opened to the eye of faith a blessed prospect beyond it. In the text, in particular, he proclaims, "I am the resurrection and the life ;" He who will raise the dead to life again, and crown believers in him with everlasting life and glory. Do you hesitate about receiving him by faith in these characters, and trusting in those gracious assurances which he makes in them, as though it were possible he might disappoint your expectations, or as though

his promises were too good to be true? Consider who he is, who thus exhibits himself to you, and offers to gladden your hearts with cheering views of death, and of what lies beyond it. It is JESUS, that knoweth all things, and hath all power in heaven and in earth. It is JESUS, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; and whose words can never pass away, till all be fulfilled. It is JESUS, in fine, who still proclaimeth to us the voice of his word, (Rev. i. 18,) as he did to the beloved disciple in vision by the voice of his mouth, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Are all these sayings concerning the Lord Jesus Christ the declarations of the inspired Scriptures, the oracles of God? Then is it certain, that they must all be infallibly true. Then must we be constrained to acknowledge, that at his will the place of departed spirits must open its doors, and death yield up his prey, however long concealed in the grave. Why then should we delay a moment to trust in him with joyful confidence, as the resurrection and the life? Why should we refuse that comfort, which the assured persuasion, on the authority of his word, that there will be an end of death and its triumphs, that there is attainable by us a future state of life and blessedness, is eminently calculated to afford?

2. Realizing views of Jesus, as the resurrection and the life, are wont to support and cheer believers in declining health, and to moderate or remove their fears of death in the near prospect of their own dissolution. There is a dread of death, a reluctance to submit to its stroke, which but few comparatively can entirely overcome. Nature shrinks at the darkness, the chill, the silence of the grave: and present abundance of this world's goods and delights, so far from giving us ease at the thought of death, even when apparently at a distance, does only increase our abhorrence of it, and strengthens our dread of its approach. But what the world and the things of the world cannot do for us in this matter, that, by the grace of God, the Gospel of Jesus is abundantly competent to. A believing, habitual regard to Jesus, as the resurrection and the life, is of all things the best adapted to calm the fears, to soothe the anxieties, and to brighten the hopes of his sincere followers in the near view of death and the grave. It arms them with holy fortitude to meet their last enemy; and divests him of his sting. With the holy Job, it

enables them to say with serenity of soul, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God." (Job xix. 25, 26.) And knowing him whom they have believed; and especially knowing him as the resurrection and the life, they become daily better and better prepared to trust both their souls and their bodies to his care, assured that he will keep what they thus commit to him, against the day of his coming and glory.

3. Finally: looking in faith to the Lord Jesus, as the resurrection and the life, is a copious source of comfort and support to his followers at the death of pious relatives and friends.

The nearest earthly connections must one day be dissolved. Our dearest earthly friends must soon be taken from us, if we be not first taken from them. And these separations do often cost us many a tear, many a pang. But even in these mournful circumstances, God does not leave his children comfortless. He has provided for them a refuge, a fountain of consolation, in Jesus the resurrection and the life. And a realizing, confiding remembrance of him in these characters will both alleviate our grief for our own loss, and cause that which we may for a moment have indulged on our pious friends' account forever to cease.

Is Jesus the resurrection and the life? Why, at the death of believers in him, should we mourn for their sakes? True, they are cut off forever from earthly hopes and enjoyments. But at the same time they are far removed from the pains and troubles, the sufferings and fears, which they here experienced or were liable to. They were Jesus' friends as well as ours. And though being absent from the body, they are absent from us; yet are they present with the Lord, which for them is infinitely better. Their spirits are now rejoicing before him. Their bodies, though dead, shall live again. They now sweetly sleep in him; and at his word they shall awake and rise, new made and glorious, to die no more, to suffer no more.

Is Jesus the resurrection and the life? Why should we be swallowed up with over much sorrow at the death of believing friends, on our own account? True, we miss their endearing society, and their offices of kindness. True, we can no longer enjoy the advantage of their wise counsels and of their fervent

prayers. But we have a Father in heaven who changeth not, to go to for the mercies we need. We have an ever-living, an almighty Redeemer, whom we may securely trust to reunite us with those pious friends, whom death has removed from us. If we believe in him who is the resurrection and the life, we cannot regard the separation which has taken place, as final. Our friends, who have departed hence in the Lord, have only gone a little before us to the assembly of the spirits of the just made perfect. And though, as to their bodies, they have found in the grave, it may be, a very long, yet not an eternal home. Death for the present triumphs over them, but not forever. The term of our separation from each other will come to an end. The day is approaching, when the prince of life will throw open the gates both of their graves and of our own. In those refined, glorified bodies with which he will then clothe our immortal spirits, he will bring us together, on the morning of the resurrection, to part no more. Then, having been followers of him, followers of them who have finished their course in faith, and now rest from their labors, our joy in God, in Christ, and in one another shall be consummate and without end. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and Christian neighbors and friends shall then hail each other with bliss unutterable and full of glory. And godly ministers and all the faithful of their flocks shall be each other's joy and everlasting crowns of rejoicing in the presence of God and the Lamb.

III. Such, respected audience, are some of the consolations, which the solemn and interesting declarations of the text are calculated to yield. And certainly, if we may ever derive comfort from them, we may on the present occasion. The death of the revered, the excellent man, whose cold but dear remains we are about to follow to the tomb, is indeed, in one view, a matter both of the deepest private grief, and of public regret and lamentation. But when we recollect what ample grounds we have of hope concerning him, and of thankfulness to God for him, a believing look unto Jesus, the resurrection and the life, can hardly fail to impart abundance of consolation to our sorrowful minds, and to reduce them into sweet submission to the will of God.

It is now almost thirty and nine years, since the late Reverend Mr. Stearns, the subject of our mourning this day, was ordained as the Pastor of this flock of Christ, and the minister of this

town. And how holily, and justly, and unblameably he hath behaved himself among you ; how diligently, and faithfully, and prayerfully he hath labored for your spiritual good, all ye are witnesses, and I trust I may add, God also.

1. Your deceased pastor was a scribe well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven. To a competent share of human learning, he added a rich treasure of divine knowledge, an enlarged and experimental acquaintance with the truths of God's holy word. To the study of the Holy Scriptures he brought a sound understanding ; he industriously and prayerfully applied himself to it ; he pursued it, I am confident, with an honest heart. And the stores of heavenly truth and wisdom, which he was enabled by these means, with the divine blessing, to acquire, he seasonably produced for your benefit ; feeding you with knowledge and understanding, and from Sabbath to Sabbath bringing forth out of his treasures things new and old for your spiritual nourishment and growth.

2. He was, it is believed, eminently sound in the faith ; holding fast that form of sound words, which he had learned from the writings of those divinely authorized teachers, the holy Prophets and Apostles, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. He was a firm believer in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments : he ever appeared earnestly desirous to conform his sentiments to them ; and there are but few ministers, if any, I apprehend, whose sentiments on religion came nearer than his to that infallible standard ; but few, in whose public discourses more of the language or spirit of the Bible was manifest, than in his.

The leading articles of his faith and subjects of his preaching, in addition to the great truths and duties of natural religion, (as it is called,) were Christ Jesus the Lord, both in his humiliation and in his glory : Christ as a divine person ; and Christ as the one mediator between God and man ; the Prophet, Priest and King of his people. They were the natural depravity of the human heart, and its entire inconformity, till renewed, to the divine character, law and will ; atonement for sin by the blood of Christ, and deliverance from its prevailing power by the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost. They were repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ; justification by faith, and salvation by grace ; the necessity of works

meet for repentance, and of new obedience ; the solemn transactions of a judgment to come, and the righteous retributions of the eternal world. These were the principal, the favorite themes of his preaching ; and to these his attachment continued firm to the last. But a few weeks before his death he observed to me in conversation, that since his confinement by sickness, he had been solemnly reviewing his ministry, and particularly his preaching ; and, "I see not," said he, "were I to commence anew, how I could consistently and conscientiously inculcate a system of doctrine materially different from that, which I have taught this people from the beginning."

But though he was very clear and decided in his views of religion, and constant in his attachment to them, he was not bigoted. In him, Orthodoxy and charity were eminently united. From a principle of duty, he steadfastly maintained the above named, and other kindred doctrines, because he deemed them to be essential to the gospel scheme. From the same motives he lamented the prevalence of contrary sentiments, and, as occasion required, bore his public testimony against them. Still he cherished candor and kind feelings toward those who preached or embraced those sentiments ; and used to say, that he had not the most distant wish to see their liberty of judging and deciding for themselves in the least degree abridged. And as to those who differed from him only in points which he regarded as matters of indifference or inferior moment, he could live with them on terms of the most perfect harmony and friendship.

3. Your late lamented pastor was an able and faithful minister of the New Testament ; earnestly aiming to promote, both by his public and by his private labors, the glory of God, the interests of Christ's kingdom, and the salvation of souls, especially of those committed to his charge. He had much at heart the accomplishment of the great objects of his ministry ; longing to see the truth prevailing, and religion reviving and flourishing among you. And to the advancement of these ends, he was not sparing of his time or his pains. He was diligent in his preparations for the services of the sanctuary on the Sabbath, and zealous in performing them ; solicitous to know the lambs of his flock, and by his stated catechetical exercises, to guide their feet in the path of life ; careful to maintain the order and purity of

God's house by a vigorous and impartial, yet mild and prudent exercise of church discipline : prompt by day and night to visit the sick, and to help them in preparing for a better world : a son of consolation in the house of mourning, apt to comfort and edify the bereaved and afflicted by his presence and sympathy, his exhortations and prayers : earnest to instruct and quicken all who were anxious on the great concerns of their souls : rejoicing to see his people walking in the truth, and engaged in the things of religion : and forward to aid in all wise measures, all becoming efforts for the suppression of vice and irreligion, the promotion of Christian knowledge and virtue, the advancement of truth, righteousness and peace.

4. He was a man of prayer, "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." He religiously cultivated the spirit of devotion ; ever seeming to cherish a reverent sense of God on his mind ; a firm, constant, practical belief of his presence and perfections, providence and government ; and of the fitness, obligations and advantage of seeking him in this way of his appointment. And as he appeared to have imbibed largely of the spirit, so was he uncommonly eminent for the gift of prayer. But few equaled, none with whom I am acquainted, excelled him in this part of divine service, in the fluency of his utterance, the choiceness and appropriateness of his expressions, and a happy faculty of adapting all his addresses at the throne of grace in the presence of others to the time and occasion of praying, and to the varying circumstances of those, with whom or for whom he offered supplication.

5. He was a truly good man, in the gospel sense of the phrase ; leading apparently a life of communion with God, dependence upon him, and devotedness to him ; walking before his house with an upright heart ; endeavoring to adorn the doctrine of God his Savior by a well ordered life and conversation, and to recommend that holy gospel which he preached by his example, as well as by his exhortations and instructions.

6. Finally, he was to human eye a very humble man ; one that was fully aware of his imperfections, sins and unworthiness in the sight of God, and in comparison with the strict requirements of his righteous law ; and who built all his dependence for the divine acceptance upon the merits and atonement of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He had feared God in his youth,

and loved him in his advancing years, and habitually and conscientiously walked before him in the path of duty, according to the best of his knowledge and judgment. And yet in one of my visits to him in an early stage of his last sickness, he dwelt largely upon his deficiencies, faults and sins; and expressed with much warmth his persuasion of the vanity of his hope, had it had no better foundation to rest on, than his own virtues and obedience.

In his latter days, your pastor was tried by several severe, and by some unexpected trials and afflictions, well known to you all. In the unhappy difficulty, which led to his separation from the first religious society in this town, he was supported by conscious integrity, and by the almost entire unanimity of the church in his favor. And yet it manifestly preyed upon his spirits; and though he endeavored to bear up under it with fortitude, there can be no question that it helped to undermine his health, and shorten his days.

His last sickness was such as to allow him much leisure, which he improved, as he was able, for serious reflection and self-examination. And the result of this trial of himself seemed to be, the strengthening of his faith in the Redeemer, and the confirmation of that hope towards God, and of his acceptance to salvation, which he had previously indulged. And now, weaned from this world, and ripe for a better, he seemed entirely willing to go. "Why," said he once in my hearing with much emphasis:—"Why should I wish to linger any longer on these mortal shores?" And in near connection with this, he observed to me, that he had a hope founded not on his own righteousness, but on the merits of Christ, which he would not part with for a thousand worlds like this. Still, however, with a near and bright prospect of heaven before him, though willing, he was not impatient to be gone. Rather did he seem desirous to wait quietly for the divine signal for his dismissal. In once requesting my prayers; he added, "Pray not for my life; but pray that I may be patient and hold out to the end; pray that I may not be left to do anything which may bring dishonor upon religion, or reproach upon my profession." As his end drew near, he was taken up in setting his house in order, and giving the several members of his family his parting directions and counsels; in

Christian conversation with those of his people and friends who called upon him ; in uttering his benevolent wishes and kind desires toward all men, and, I doubt not, in secret prayer to God. In this, as indeed in every stage of his last illness, it was a privilege to be near him, so heavenly was his conversation, so submissive was his deportment, so calmly would he speak of his approaching dissolution, so firmly persuaded would he express himself of the glory that was to follow. Thus did he wait with patience all the days of his appointed time ; and when his change came, he quietly and almost imperceptibly fell asleep ; and I may confidently say, he sleeps in Jesus. O that I might die the death of the righteous, and that my latter end might be like his !

IV. Thus lived, and thus died your revered and beloved pastor. In the contemplation of such a life, and of such a death, who does not perceive substantial ground of comfort, peace and hope to surviving dear relatives and friends in looking to Jesus, as the resurrection and the life ?

The bereaved widow will be pleased to accept the condolence of the speaker at her sore affliction. Your nearest and best earthly friend, dear Madam, is removed from you, and you are left a lonely widow. And yet you are not alone. God is still with you : He who has promised to be the widow's God and judge, and never to leave or forsake those who put their trust in him, and cleave unto him with all their hearts. Christ too ever lives ; and he will abide with you. This day especially, while you are mourning the ravages of death, he presents himself to you in his word, as the resurrection and the life, in whom whosoever believeth, though he were dead, yet shall he live again, live for evermore. Let not then your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Believe in God. Cast all your burdens on the Lord. Commit yourself, and all your concerns to him, in the way of well doing. And he will approve himself a faithful Creator to you, to soothe your sorrows, to support you under all present and future trials, to relieve you from all your fears, to make all things work for your good. Believe also in Christ. In this day of mourning particularly, take refuge in him, as the resurrection and the life ; and in and through him, you will find support under your present affliction ; comfort in the view of

your own dissolution, when it shall come ; and at length obtain a happy meeting with your departed lover and friend, never more to be separated, in the world of bliss above.

The bereaved children will kindly receive, I trust, a word of condolence from one who is their, as he was their father's friend. You have lost, my dear friends, one of the kindest and most affectionate of fathers ; the faithful guide of your youth ; one who took a deep and lively interest in the welfare, temporal and eternal, of each of you ; and who often made intercession for you at the throne of grace. While you mourn his loss, take occasion therefrom to thank God for giving you such a father, and continuing him to you so long. Bless God for all the advantages you have received from his care for your education, from his instructions and prayers. Embalm his memory in your hearts. Follow his wise and pious counsels, his virtuous examples. Follow Christ especially, who is the resurrection and the life, your father's bright exemplar and the rock of his trust ; that so you may be partakers through Christ of that blessed hope which rendered death easy and welcome to your revered father, and inheritors finally with him of that joy, on which, we may not doubt, that he is already entered.

For the sons especially who have entered on the sacred ministry, or who have it in their eye, I can offer no better prayer, than that they may engage in its work with their father's excellent spirit and views, and fulfill it with the like fidelity and success. May his mantle descend on you, my dear friends ! May a double portion of his spirit rest on you ! May your father's God, the God of your pious ancestors, be with you all your lives long, help you to finish your course with joy, and give you a part in the resurrection of the just !

This church and religious society have cause of mourning and lamentation this day, for the death of their venerated and beloved pastor and minister. But while you sorrow, Christian friends, that you shall see his face no more ; shall no more hear his voice, or enjoy his devout and edifying ministrations, you sorrow not for him, as those who are without hope. He now rests from his labors, and his works do follow him. Submit then to the will of God. Remember him with affection, who for so many years has had the rule over you in the Lord, taught you the way of truth and salvation, and watched for your souls, in view of that account,

which he has now been summoned to give. Be mindful of those instructions, counsels and warnings, which he gave you, while yet with you, and whereby being dead he yet speaketh to you. And endeavor to walk in all those good ways to which he directed you, and in which, while living, he was careful to go before you.

Let the members of this church of Christ especially remember how they have received and heard at the mouth of their pastor now deceased, and hold fast. Bear in mind in particular, dear brethren and sisters, the faithful affectionate admonitions and warnings, which he gave you, when he took his leave of you at the table of the Lord, and when he bade farewell to this house of God forever. Bear in mind that solemn, that pathetic address, which he commenced after distributing that day the sacred elements of Christ's body and blood, with saying, "With desire I have desired to eat this Christian passover with you, before I die;" and which he closed with that memorable exclamation, "It is finished! It is finished!" The words of that address drew tears from many an eye, when spoken. May they never cease to retain a place in your hearts, now that he who uttered them is no more! They were in a manner his dying counsels to you, the last tokens of his love and his earnest concern for your spiritual welfare. Never forget then that solemn, that interesting occasion, nor the words which then fell from his venerated lips. Treasure them up in your minds, as a rich legacy of your deceased pastor's love; and see that you profit by them. As he then and at other times exhorted you, stand fast in the faith and order of the gospel. Retain with pious affection those great principles of religion, upon which this church was founded, which your late pastor did uniformly inculcate, and which appear to be so conformable to the word of God, so essential to the gospel scheme of saving truth. In your present destitute state, be much in prayer, that God would, in his due time, provide you with a pastor after his own heart, who shall feed you with wisdom and understanding. And in the mean while, take heed that no roots of bitterness springing up trouble you. Beware of spiritual indifference; beware of contentions and divisions. Hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Study the things which make for peace, and things whereby ye may edify one another; and may the God of truth, peace and love be with you!

Finally, my respected audience, may God enable us all to profit by the solemn scenes of this day ! We are all reminded hereby of our frailty and mortality. "The fathers, where are they ? And the Prophets, do they live forever ?" (Zech. 15.) The silent remains of the late shepherd of this flock of Christ remind us, my brethren in the ministry, that we shall not be suffered long to continue our services in the sanctuary, by reason of death. They admonish us all, my hearers, that we too are but strangers and sojourners upon earth, as all our fathers were. Let us all then give heed to this monitory voice, with which the providence of God is addressing us this day as it were from the tomb. Let us all be excited to work with diligence the works which God hath given us severally to do, while the day of life lasts, seeing that the night of death is coming, when no man can work. As many of us as be teachers and ministers in God's house, let us wait on our ministry, and be faithful to fulfill it. As many as be hearers, let them be constant to hear, ready to receive and do, according to God's word. Let us all be sober, and watch unto prayer. Let us all be engaged in working out our salvation with fear and trembling, looking to Him for effectual aid, who worketh in us to will and to do. Let us believe, repent, and do works meet for repentance. Whatsoever it behooveth us to do, let us do it with our might, seeing there is no work nor device in the grave to which we haste. Thus let us be engaged in doing with patience the will of God ; that so, when our work is over, we may have hope and comfort in death, through Jesus the resurrection and the life. AMEN.



APPENDIX.

Rev. Mr. Stearns descended from an ancient and very respectable family in Billerica, Mass. A remote ancestor, Mr. John Stearns, was an inhabitant of that town at its incorporation in 1665. He was originally, it is probable, from Watertown; and died March 5, 1669. His son, Mr. John Stearns, born in May, 1654, was the first person born in Billerica, on record. He spent his days in his native place; and died Oct 26, 1728. "His long continuance in several offices, of a civil and military kind, affords a proof of the confidence reposed in him by his fellow citizens." Among his descendants were Hon. Isaac Stearns of the Senate of Massachusetts in 1787, Mr. John Stearns the grandfather, and Rev. Josiah Stearns the father of Rev. Mr. Stearns of Bedford. *See Farmer's "Genealogical Register," and his "Historical Sketch of Billerica," p. 7, Note, and p. 32, 33.*

Mr. John Stearns, the last named, married Miss Esther Johnson, a lineal descendant, of the third generation, from the celebrated Capt. Edward Johnson, a principal founder of the town and church of Woburn, and author of the History of New England, entitled, "Wonder-working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England." She was a daughter of Capt. Edward Johnson, (a grandson of the above-named Capt. Edward, and a son of William Johnson Esq. one of the Board of Assistants of Mass. under the Colonial Charter, in 1683—1686,) who was born in Woburn, March 19, 1657; resided in that quarter of the town which has since become Burlington; was a deacon of the church of Woburn, frequently a Select-man, and in 1700 a Representative of the town. He died of grief, it is said, for the loss of a beloved son, Mr. Ichabod Johnson, who was killed by the Indians in the memorable "Lovewell's Fight," May 8, 1725. The father died in August or September after, leaving three sons and five daughters. Of the sons, was Edward Johnson, a founder and a deacon of the church in Woburn Precinct, now Burlington; a gentleman well known and highly respected in his day; and of the daughters, was the aforesaid Esther, wife of John Stearns of Billerica.

Rev. Josiah Stearns, son of John and Esther Stearns, was born at Billerica, Jan. 20, 1732; was graduated at Harvard college, 1751: ordained at Epping, N. H. March 8, 1758; and died there in 1788. Two sermons on 1 John, iv. 16, "God is love," preached by him in 1787 at Exeter, N. H. and published shortly after his death (at the request of a friend made to him in his last sick-

ness) for the benefit of the students in the Academy there, bear testimony both to his talents and his piety.

Rev. Samuel Stearns, of Bedford, was a son of Rev. Josiah Stearns of Epping, N. H. by his second wife, a daughter of Rev. Samuel Ruggles of Billerica. He was born at Epping, April 8, 1770 ; fitted for college after his father's death, at Exeter Academy, under the patronage of Hon. John Phillips, its founder ; and graduated at Harvard college in 1794. His theological studies he pursued under the direction of Rev. Jonathan French, of Andover, (whose daughter, Miss Abigail French, he afterwards married,) and was ordained over the Church and Society in Bedford, April 27, 1795. A new religious society having been legally formed, Nov. 9, 1832, by the name of the "Trinitarian Congregational Society;" and the Church having voted, at a meeting, May 9, 1833, to dissolve its connection with the First Parish, and to accept an invitation given it to unite itself with the new society, for the purpose of maintaining public worship and the institutions of the Gospel, Rev. Mr Stearns was solemnly constituted the Minister, or Religious Teacher of that society, June 5, 1833. He died Dec. 26, 1834, of a decline, the result, probably, of a scrofulous affection, with which he had been many years more or less afflicted. It is worthy of remark, that during the whole of his protracted ministry, almost thirty-nine years, he was never absent from his people at any Communion season but one, viz. that which occurred about a fortnight before his death. Previously to the communion before, viz. that on the second Sabbath in October, he had cherished an earnest desire that he might be able, if it were God's will, to officiate once more on the interesting occasion, and then bid his church farewell; though he was apprehensive that the weather, or the state of his health would be such, as to prevent him. But in this particular, divine Providence was propitious to his wishes. The weather on that day was remarkably fine; and (to use his own words) "his spirits were enlivened, and strength seemed to be given him for the occasion." Having obtained his son, Rev. William A. Stearns of Cambridgeport, to perform the previous services, the venerable man about the close of the sermon, with thankful heart, yet with emaciated countenance and feeble step, entered the house of God; and there, having once more, according to his desire, ministered the memorials of Christ's dying love, and united with the church in singing a hymn, he took his final leave of them in the solemn, affecting address, alluded to in the foregoing discourse. From that day he went no more abroad, being confined to his house, and most of the time to the room in which he died, till his death.











